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Chair

Mrs. Deborah Schulte

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● (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.)): I'd like to bring the meeting to order, please.

We have two full rounds. If we're going to get all the questioning done that we want, I'd like to start right away. We are also looking to have a little bit of committee time for some motions that have been brought forward; we will deal with those right at the end, if you don't mind.

The first thing I want to do before we get started is turn our attention to the biggest issue we are facing in Canada right now, which is Fort McMurray. I'm thinking of the many hectares of forest that have gone, the homes that are gone, and the communities that have been destroyed. I was very pleased to be in the House this morning during all of the leaders' statements, when the government committed to matching any funds that come in through the Red Cross. I'm hoping that many people will give their support to Fort McMurray and to the rebuilding efforts that will be necessary.

I just want everybody in Fort McMurray to know that here in this committee we are thinking of them as we are working in our deliberations today. Thank you.

I want to welcome everyone.

We have with us, from the Nature Conservancy of Canada, John Lounds and Lisa McLaughlin. Thank you for being here.

We have, from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Alison Woodley and Sabine Jessen.

We have with us, by video conference, Peter Kendall. Thank you, Peter, for joining us via video conference.

I would like to start with Peter, if I could, only because I'm always nervous of video conferencing and wonder whether we might lose him through that medium. If everybody is okay with starting with him, we'll get started.

We have two rounds. There's the 11 o'clock to 12 o'clock panel with this group; then some, I know, will have to leave. We'll get that cushioning done and then move to the second round.

Let's get started, then, with Peter Kendall.

Thank you, and welcome.

Mr. Peter Kendall (Executive Director, Earth Rangers): Thank you, Madam Chair.

As you know, my name is Peter Kendall. I am the executive director of Earth Rangers and the Schad Foundation. I really appreciate the opportunity to appear before you here today and your hard work on this important topic.

To provide some context for my remarks, I would like to start by saying a few words about our work at the Schad Foundation and Earth Rangers.

The Schad Foundation is a private family foundation. The foundation provides funding to registered charities for work on wildlife and habitat conservation projects. Our current areas of focus are large-scale boreal forest conservation, marine protected areas, and mechanisms to promote recovery of species at risk.

Most of my time is spent on my work at Earth Rangers. Earth Rangers is a kids' conservation organization. Our programs educate children and their families about the importance of protecting biodiversity, engage them in tangible activities to protect wildlife and its habitat, and encourage them to explore their local natural areas. We reach children through live animal presentations in over 800 schools annually across Canada and through almost daily television presence.

Thanks in large part to the support we received from the federal government—thank you again—our program has grown quickly over the past few years to the point where we now have the largest membership base of any conservation group in Canada, with nearly 140,000 members, all of them children, aged roughly six to twelve. They represent every province and territory.

One of the core messages we teach our members is that if we are going to make a difference for wildlife, all sectors of society must work together. This is why we are so excited to see the new spirit of co-operation and transparency from our federal government. What is even more exciting is that this spirit seems to have become infectious and is being adopted by other governments and non-governmental organizations across the country.

It is critical that we capitalize on this momentum. While many gains have been made, the sad reality is that we continue to lose biodiversity and have failed to live up to some of our key international and domestic commitments.

For example, Canada's goals under the convention on biodiversity include protecting at least 17% of terrestrial areas and 10% of marine areas by 2020. While progress has been made terrestrially, less than 1% of our oceans are currently set aside from resource development and fishing.

Even worse, a 2013 assessment of species at risk shows that population trends for most species listed by COSEWIC remain bleak. Of the 369 species that were evaluated more than once, the status of almost 90% either was unchanged or had deteriorated. Even when COSEWIC scientists have recommended that a species be listed, these recommendations often languish. Research out of the University of British Columbia has revealed that the average wait time for a species that has been recommended for listing is almost four years.

The other reality is that Canada has made a major commitment to combatting climate change, and again, we congratulate you on this. This critical effort, though, is going to consume a large amount of financial and human capital over the next several years. As a result, we feel it is important that you are selective and focused on your other conservation priorities.

While there are many conservation needs across the country, two particular areas stand out to us as deserving of a priority focus: marine conservation and species at risk.

While we recognize that completing terrestrial protected areas is also important, we feel that significant progress has been made on this in the last 30 years, with 10% of our land base now protected. It is also an area where we continue to see strong movement and leadership by the provinces. For example, the new government in Newfoundland and Labrador has mandated the environment minister to finalize a natural areas system plan. Minister Phillips recently announced the Alberta government's intention to increase protected areas from 12% to 17%. Ontario and Quebec are working on plans to protect 50% of their far north and, of course, there is the great work you guys are doing with Ontario, moving Rouge Park ahead, so congratulations on that.

With respect to oceans conservation, the government is quickly trying to play catch-up and meet its international oceans conservation commitments, and we really applaud this. This is going to require creative thinking, sustained political will, and focusing on what the science tells us.

Marine protected areas are a great tool, but we need to go beyond that. Almost 25 years ago, the collapse of the east coast cod fishery became the global poster child for oceans mismanagement.

● (1110)

There now is an opportunity for Canada to become a world leader in sustainable ocean stewardship by actively implementing science-backed recovery plans for the hard-hit fisheries. Like marine protected areas, this would be good for the ecosystem and ultimately good for fishery-dependent economies. From what we can see from the outside, you're moving in a very strong direction on this file. Our hope is that you just keep the pressure on here.

With respect to species at risk, it's a little more difficult. The scale of this challenge is immense, making it easy to get overwhelmed. It's going to often result in efforts being spread too thin, resulting in little progress being made.

We do understand that there are fiscal challenges, but we shouldn't use this as an excuse to maintain the status quo. We can and must do a better job with the funds that are currently available. This should start with better alignment across government and agencies, greater collaboration with industry and non-governmental organizations, and the adoption of new approaches.

The vast majority of species at risk in Canada live on private lands. Traditional command and control approaches won't work well in these landscapes. We need new mechanisms and tools to both incent stewardship and discourage further habitat destruction. This could include things like biodiversity offsets, payments for ecosystem services, and safe harbour agreements.

Species and habitats don't exist in silos, and neither do the solutions to their protection, yet this is how we often try to tackle these problems. I'm not just talking about governments here; ENGOs tend to operate in the same way.

Even here at Earth Rangers, we realized this a while ago when one of our eight-year-old members sent in the money that she had worked so hard for by doing chores and by holding a lemonade stand. The donation came with a note saying, “I am an Earth Ranger and I want to save endangered animals. Please make the best choice with this money and make it count!” It was the last part of this note that made us really ask if we were putting this money to the best use and if the investments we were making in species recovery were really making a difference.

After speaking to people in government, academia, industry, and ENGOs, we realized that many others were asking the same questions and wrestling with the same issues. It seemed to us that everybody was unhappy with the status quo. To help inform these collective discussions, we recently launched a study with the University of Ottawa's Institute of the Environment in collaboration with Environment Canada and the Forest Products Association of Canada.

The ultimate goal of this study is to develop recommendations on how we can improve our species at risk efforts in Canada. The study is focusing on both what we can do today with the tools and policies immediately at our disposal, as well as looking abroad for what new approaches and mechanisms may be worth considering here in Canada.

The first phase of this study is scheduled to be completed later this summer, and we would welcome the opportunity to meet with this committee again and to share the results and explore how we can collaborate on improving the species at risk management in Canada.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that great overview of what we need to address.

I would like to turn it over to Nature Conservancy and John Lounds, please.

Thank you.

Mr. John Lounds (President and Chief Executive Officer, Nature Conservancy of Canada): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to present to the committee today. It's great to be here with friends and colleagues, and we're happy to provide our input to your study.

I'm John Lounds, president and CEO of the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Joining me today is Lisa McLaughlin, our chief conservation officer.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada—the other NCC, not the National Capital Commission and not the National Citizens Coalition—is a made-in-Canada, non-profit charitable organization that is this country's largest land trust. We work with Canadians to conserve and care for some of our most threatened natural areas and the species they sustain.

The lands we conserve come to us most often through purchase, donation, or conservation agreements. Our partners include individuals, communities, corporations, governments, and indigenous peoples. Ours is a collaborative conservation model that facilitates lasting results.

I'm sure many committee members are already aware of our work. More than half of your ridings feature Nature Conservancy of Canada projects. In fact, more than 80% of Canadians live within 100 kilometres of NCC conservation lands. There are a couple of other aspects of our work especially relevant to today's discussion that you may not be familiar with, such as mineral rights relinquishment and conservation planning.

NCC has helped lay the groundwork for some large publicly protected areas. We are uniquely positioned to bring together industry and government to address private mineral rights, which is an important step in the creation of large federally protected areas, terrestrial or marine. We negotiated with six companies to relinquish the mineral rights to more than 4,000 square kilometres in the Yukon, paving the way for the creation of Vuntut National Park. We have done similar work to help create Gwaii Haanas, Canada's first designated national marine conservation reserve, and in the Flathead River Valley in British Columbia.

We've also assisted marine protected areas by acquiring fee simple ownership along adjacent coastlines. NCC projects are located along the Musquash Estuary in New Brunswick, the Lake Superior national marine conservation area, and the Gulf Islands of British Columbia. We look forward to continuing to play this role as Canada considers new protected areas.

NCC is also a Canadian pioneer in conservation planning. We have spent a lot of time thinking about the integration of protected areas and developing tools to ensure that we are targeting the highest-priority places. We have completed highly detailed assessments of all of Canada's southern ecoregions, and we are now beginning similar work for northern geographies.

Far from academic exercises, our ecoregional assessments and nature atlases are available for public use. I am happy to have copies of our Labrador nature atlas here. The author, Lindsay Notzl, is here in the back row. The atlases are available for public use and help determine where to invest limited funds for the greatest conservation impact. These assessments support more than 80 finer-scale natural area plans, which means we can roll up our data and report on the local and national significance of our work. They allow us to develop science-based conservation plans, and they guide our investments and our decision-making. They help us to integrate our work within the greater protected area ecosystem.

That brings us to the key message we want to leave with you today. In our view, the range of federally protected areas is not currently integrated in any formal way to achieve Canada's targets and objectives, and nor are they coordinated with provincial, indigenous, or privately protected areas. We should not let this current lack of integration stand in the way of immediate progress toward our commitments. The work on integration can and should occur concurrent to reaching our international commitments by 2020.

Canada has agreed to the 20 Aichi biodiversity targets, including target 11, committing signatories to protect 17% of their lands and inland waters, and 10% of their marine areas, by 2020. Target 11 is clear that the areas must be of a certain quality: equitably managed, ecologically representative, and connected. The good news is that we believe Canada can reach terrestrial target 11 by the end of the decade. Marine conservation will be more challenging.

Perhaps more than any other nation on the planet, Canada has sufficient natural and wild spaces left to allow us to become a world leader in conservation, but we need a road map to guide us. To address this we recommend two immediate steps. First, the federal government should consider urgently convening a panel of thoughtful Canadians tasked with devising this road map for achieving our Aichi targets by 2020. At present a lot of players are working diligently and independently on Aichi-inspired projects, but we are working in silos. We need a mechanism to bring us together to make sure we're making meaningful contributions toward common goals.

● (1115)

We imagine a panel that can gather stakeholders, government, indigenous peoples, and NGOs. Its work needs to begin immediately and, frankly, needs to be completed by the end of 2016. Panel members could bring a level of science-based expertise to the table and a keen understanding of government structure and decision-making. The recommendations must be designed to obtain the political buy-in needed for success.

In considering the 17% terrestrial component, the panel might begin by considering the list of protected area proposals contained in the report “Protecting Canada: Is it in our nature?”, by our good friend sitting next to us here, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. We'd be happy to assist with this panel.

Our second recommendation would be to implement a road map to 2020. It must be an inclusive process. That means counting the achievements of provinces, indigenous conservation initiatives, NGOs, and the private sector. The federal role is to ensure that core areas are protected, but it will be up to all partners to fill the gaps so protected areas are ecologically representative and connected. These are also conditions of the Aichi targets.

Let's establish a process for counting our conserved lands that is clear, credible, and consistent with other countries, such as the United States and Australia, and let's ensure the process is auditable and resolves jurisdictional differences. Shared recognition results in shared responsibility and shared action to achieve our collective objectives.

Achieving the Aichi targets will be an ambitious step forward, but if it's all we do, it still won't be enough to protect the areas that sustain us. Ecologists are now telling us that as much 50% of our landscapes need to be conserved to protect Canada's essential biodiversity and the delivery of ecological services. How much is enough to ensure fully functioning landscapes for nature and for people? How much is enough to ensure our species have space to move and adapt in the face of climate change?

To answer those questions, we recommend the government work with key partners to undertake a science-based conservation assessment for Canada as a whole, not just Labrador or other places, much like the NCC has done for individual ecoregions. This major assessment will take some time, perhaps a few years. It should speak to the integration of greater protected area ecosystems. It should identify priority areas and connections and outline the roles that each level of government, indigenous communities, and non-governmental organizations can play. It should also consider building on winning strategies that produce significant conservation results and are integrated into the landscape in a cost-effective way —such as, we would argue, the current Government of Canada-NCC partnership in the natural areas conservation program.

The program is designed to protect habitat for species at risk and for migratory birds and to create and enhance connections or corridors between protected areas, including national wildlife areas, national parks, and migratory bird sanctuaries. It's an integrated model. With an investment to date of approximately $275 million from the Government of Canada, the program has resulted in more than 400,000 hectares conserved in southern Canada. Additionally, NCC has raised $500 million to match these funds. Cash and land donations have come from individuals, foundations, corporations, and other levels of government.

The program has also supported 38 local land trusts and served to engage more Canadians in nature and conservation through the various volunteer programs, with more than 10,000 people over the past several years. The lands conserved so far provide habitat for 201 terrestrial and freshwater species at risk. The program directly complements federally protected areas with conservation lands that contain samples of the full range of existing ecosystems and ecological processes. In fact, half the program's conservation projects are within 25 kilometres of a federally protected area. Quality conservation is about integrating biodiversity strategies across all landscapes.

To conclude, Canada has an opportunity to build a natural legacy beyond 2020, with conservation in the right places done the right way. Let's reach our Aichi targets by establishing an expert panel to draft the road map to get us there, include all stakeholders, and create a clear process to define and count all contributions.

At the same time, let's begin the work to go beyond Aichi by launching a science-based conservation assessment for Canada that speaks to the integration of protected areas and the roles for all stakeholders, and building on matching fund models, such as the natural area conservation program, to encourage Canadians from all walks of life to participate in a conservation future worthy of this great country. Again, we'd be pleased to assist in these initiatives.

● (1120)

Canada's 150th birthday is just around the corner. Let's celebrate 2017 by demonstrating significant progress in advancing a plan to ensure our natural heritage is still here, and better, when Canada turns 300.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we get to hear from CPAWS.

I want to remind you that you have 10 minutes. That was just slightly over. I'll let you know when you have one minute left.

Alison, you're up.

Ms. Alison Woodley (National Director, Parks Program, National Office, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society): Thank you very much.

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about federal protected areas.

I'm Alison Woodley, the national director of the CPAWS parks program. I'm here with Sabine, the national director of our oceans program. I'll spend a few minutes introducing CPAWS and speaking about terrestrial protected areas in my very short five minutes, and then Sabine will address marine protected area issues.

Since 1963 CPAWS, which is a nationwide charitable conservation organization, has been working hard to create parks and protected areas and make sure they're managed to conserve nature. This has been the core of our work. Over that time we've led in the creation of over two thirds of Canada's protected areas.

The vision of CPAWS is to protect at least half of Canada's public land, fresh water, and ocean. We adopted this vision a decade ago in light of the growing scientific consensus that we need to protect at least half of ecosystems in an interconnected way to effectively conserve them, both to sustain people and to sustain nature.

This is well articulated in the Nature Needs Half vision, an event that a number of you were able to attend on Monday night at the National Library, and we appreciated that.

It's also articulated in a recent E.O. Wilson book. E.O. Wilson is an eminent American scientist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author who actually coined the term “biodiversity”. He's in his 80s, and at the end of his long career he has concluded that at least half of the earth needs to be managed to conserve nature. He has just released a book called *Half -Earth*, and I'd recommend that you read it.

As the environment commissioner pointed out earlier this week, we have a unique opportunity in Canada to create large connected protected areas, but at this point we haven't grasped that opportunity. Canada has only protected 10% of our land and inland waters at this point. We're lagging way behind the rest of the world. We were a shocking 32nd out of 34 OECD countries in the percentage of land protected in 2014.

We've made little progress since 2010 when we signed onto the biodiversity targets, and we have no plan in place yet to deliver on the 2020 targets, or to deliver on the end goal of conserving nature. I think it's always important to focus on what we're actually trying to achieve—that my colleagues have also shared—which is that we're trying to conserve nature. We know we need to do much more, and those targets are a step toward that goal of what we need to do to conserve nature.

I'm going to highlight three points that I think are opportunities to move forward and that the federal government can help with.

We need federal leadership. As we know, jurisdiction over land management in Canada is shared among federal, provincial, territorial, and indigenous governments. Similar to what we're now seeing on climate change, where there is strong federal leadership, we need that federal leadership to bring together governments and to bring together other interested parties to collaborate and create a plan to achieve the goal of conserving nature, with targets as a step along the way. This leadership would make a big difference.

Another key opportunity in Canada is to work in partnership with indigenous communities. CPAWS works with indigenous communities across the country who are working hard to protect large areas of land to safeguard natural and cultural values. Thaidene Nëné in the Northwest Territories is one example you'll hear more about later today. Supporting and embracing these efforts in a way that respects indigenous rights and interests offers a huge opportunity to advance both conservation and reconciliation efforts in Canada.

A third area of opportunity is to better link protected areas and climate change strategies. We have a climate change crisis. We also have a biodiversity crisis, and these are closely interrelated. The Paris climate agreement recognizes the important role ecosystems play in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Protected areas store and sequester biological carbon and help nature and people adapt to climate change. We need to make sure that the pan-Canadian climate strategy that is being developed right now includes protected areas and reflects the important role of other ecosystem-based approaches as part of the climate change solution. This could help to drive and advance protected areas creation and better management.

Across Canada there are large-scale protection initiatives to build on. We're not starting from scratch here. Some of them have already been mentioned—for example, Ontario and Quebec's commitments to protect half their northern regions, the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, which is an NGO large landscape scale initiative in western Canada and the U.S., and the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, which you'll hear more about next week.

● (1125)

Bringing together and supporting these initiatives would offer some really exciting opportunities for collaboration and help identify potential synergies that can help us move forward. I might note that there are examples from around the world of countries that are already doing this.

There's also important work to be done to get the federal protected areas house in order. We do have detailed recommendations about this in our reports. You will all have received a copy of this report, *en français ou en anglais*, and we do have detailed recommendations in there. I don't have time to go through them, but I do have one point I'd like to make.

I spend a lot of time working on national park management. Our special report on commercial development threats, which you will also have received—

The Chair: Just be mindful that you are over five minutes, which means you're taking away from another. I just wanted to make sure you know. Thank you.

Ms. Alison Woodley: There is an urgent need to refocus Parks Canada on its first priority by law of maintaining and restoring ecological integrity, and there are recommendations in that report.

To conclude, there are significant challenges but also huge opportunities, particularly with the new commitments by the current government in mandate letters and the commitment from the Prime Minister to go beyond our targets. We're committed to helping in any way we can to scale up efforts so we can conserve ecosystems for Canadians and wildlife into the future.

Thank you.

Sabine.

● (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

Please proceed.

Ms. Sabine Jessen (National Director, Oceans Program, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society): Thank you, committee members, for having us here today. I wanted to focus on CPAWS's concerns with the quantity and quality of marine protected areas in Canada, and also make recommendations to you for how we could improve on the current situation.

You did hear earlier this week from government officials that there are a number of legal tools available to establish marine protected areas in Canada. You may have also come away with a feeling that to date it's been a rather ad hoc approach to MPA establishment.

One observation I do want to make from my decades of work on marine conservation in Canada, and it actually applies more broadly, is that there is generally a double standard when it comes to how we treat protection on land versus the ocean. On land, it's generally accepted that industrial uses like logging, mining, oil and gas, and hydroelectric development should be prohibited. However, in the ocean the tendency is to allow a variety of industrial uses to continue in our protected areas.

The downside to this approach is that not only is it very difficult to distinguish between MPAs and the ocean areas outside them, but in the long term we're not going to achieve either the benefits for both biodiversity conservation and for the ecosystem services that we rely on if we don't provide adequate and effective protection for our marine protected areas.

Many scientific studies, including a recent one, have looked globally and they have concluded that 30% of the marine environment should be fully protected if we're going to conserve biodiversity over the long term. What does it mean to fully protect marine areas? It means that fishing and industrial uses like offshore oil and gas, mining, dredging, and dumping shouldn't be allowed. But they are allowed right now in many of our protected areas.

The scientific evidence is definitive on the point that aside from climate change, fishing causes some of the largest changes to marine ecosystems, whether it's destruction of benthic habitat, changes in the trophic structure, or changes in marine food webs. Fully protected marine areas that prohibit industrial-scale fishing and other industrial uses have been shown to significantly increase the diversity of species and the overall numbers and size of individuals as well as increase the resilience of marine ecosystems to the impacts of climate change.

Over the past few years, CPAWS has conducted a number of studies focusing on marine protected areas in Canada, which I believe members have received. These are two of them. Our overall conclusion is that Canada lags behind many countries in the world in MPA coverage. Most of our marine protected areas are small, and current protection standards for existing MPAs are weak with less than 1% with any form of protection and only 0.1% that is fully protected. The current pace and approach to MPA establishment must change significantly if the rate of decline in marine biodiversity is to be halted.

We've made many recommendations in these reports. I'm just going to highlight a few key ones.

First, we absolutely need minimum protection standards for all marine protected areas. We need to prohibit industrial uses and we need to have large parts—at least 50%—of each marine protected area fully protected from fishing and all other uses. We need to provide—

The Chair: Sabine, I'm going to have to cut you off, unfortunately, because we won't have the full round of questioning that we'd like to have. We will make sure that we get your written statements. I'm hoping we can get some of the points that you wanted to get to in the questioning. You can submit anything after, and we'll make sure that gets in front of everybody.

Our first round of questioning is with Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you to all of you for providing us with a wealth of information on the work you do and some of the challenges we face in Canada.

I'd like to direct my questions to CPAWS. We received from you the special CPAWS report on our national parks and your concerns about development taking place within those national parks. To what degree do you feel that development within those parks should be prohibited?

● (1135)

Ms. Alison Woodley: Thanks for that question.

We have highlighted that over the last number of years there has been an emerging and renewed trend of threats to our mountain national parks, specifically Banff and Jasper. This is something that is not new. This has happened in the past. The most recent time was in the 1990s, when there were huge commercial development threats in Banff specifically. There was a really comprehensive process and study put in place, the Banff Bow Valley study, which then resulted at the end of the day in a suite of measures that were designed to limit and cap development in the mountain parks, recognizing that they cannot sustain endless development. Those narrow valleys, where all the people are, are also the areas that wildlife need, so we can't have endless development.

What we're actually saying—

Hon. Ed Fast: I'm just going to interrupt for one second, simply because my time is short. I only have six minutes, probably four and half left now.

I was very direct in my question: do you believe that additional development in those specific parks that you've identified in your report should be prohibited, or is there a different position you're taking?

Ms. Alison Woodley: There needs to be a cap. Well, there is a cap on development, and it needs to be adhered to, basically.

Hon. Ed Fast: Here's my concern. This is no criticism of your position, but I had a chance to review some of the testimony we've already heard. For example, Kevin McNamee, who is the VP for one of the directorates for Parks Canada, said the following:

> In short, we do not just establish new parks and NMCAs and then throw away the key. As Parliament has directed through the Canada National Parks Act since 1930, and the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act since 2002, our mandate is both to protect and ensure that visitors use, benefit, and enjoy these special places....

And then the Prime Minister's mandate letter to our environment minister highlights four things that she's expected to do. One is to develop Canada's national parks system. The word "develop" isn't actually implying expanding, because it's dealt with separately in that mandate letter. Another is to develop Parks Canada programs and services so that more Canadians can experience our national parks. A third one is to make admission for all visitors to national parks free in 2017. Another one in the mandate letter is to protect our national parks by limiting development within them.

What I'm painting is a picture of a natural tension between a desire to have increasing numbers of Canadians enjoy our national parks, yet on the other hand to protect those national parks. I would love to hear from you on how that tension will be resolved. It's pretty clear this government does want to increase visitor use in our national parks. To do that, you're going to have to allow some development to accommodate for that use. How would you reconcile those two?

Ms. Alison Woodley: The development pressures are most intense in Banff and Jasper, and they always have been. Again, in the 1990s there were limits put in place, including in the act, which now makes it clear that ecological integrity will be the first priority for management. There were caps on development put in place specific to the mountain parks.

CPAWS absolutely embraces the idea that people need to enjoy and appreciate our parks. This is absolutely critical for people to have the opportunity to experience nature and to become conservationists. It's how I became a conservationist. That's not the challenge. The challenge is when that use supersedes the ability to protect and the mandate to actually pass along these areas unimpaired. That's what the act and the limits to development in Banff were designed to do, to make sure that the park isn't impaired for future generations.

We're actually just saying that we need to adhere to those limits, put in place a decade or more ago, to make sure that this happens. There are now infrastructure developments that are encroaching on those limits, and that's what we're calling on—

Hon. Ed Fast: So how do you propose we accommodate the very significant number of additional visitors to those two parks without further development?

Ms. Alison Woodley: Well, it's going to be challenging, but if we are going to pass those along unimpaired, we need to figure out a way to do that, and it doesn't mean endless development. We need to keep that cap on, otherwise there won't be grizzly bears and wolves in those parks, and all the other critters that rely on those parks.

Hon. Ed Fast: My request to you is to be part of the solution here, because there will be additional visitors to those two iconic parks in our country, and we'll have to accommodate them somehow.

● (1140)

Ms. Alison Woodley: We would love to be part of the solution.

Hon. Ed Fast: I just want to ask a question to Mr. Lounds.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Lounds, you mentioned bringing together all of the partners inclusively and establishing a method to determine our collective progress in reaching our Aichi targets. This is something that I had already had concerns about, and you've highlighted the fact that we actually haven't catalogued across Canada exactly how much all of the different contributors—the NGOs, your organization, Ducks Unlimited, the governments across the country, the private sector—actually contribute to reaching our Aichi targets.

Can you be a bit more specific or identify what is not being achieved here?

The Chair: We are at six minutes and 15 seconds. Can you answer in 15 seconds? Otherwise, I'll have to say that we'll let this question go till later. Go ahead.

Mr. John Lounds: Work needs to be done on that. I know that Environment Canada has begun work on how to count and do a better job with this. I think that's part and parcel of what we need in order to move forward.

Hon. Ed Fast: I would have assumed you would have done that in the past.

The Chair: Mr. Amos.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Out of respect for Sabine, whose conservation work in marine areas is reaching legendary status, I'd like to invite her to take 45 seconds to complete her thoughts.

Ms. Sabine Jessen: Thank you very much, Will.

Beyond minimum protection standards, one of the other issues is giving interim protection for areas that are being considered for protection. We need to move from site-by-site MPA establishment to establishing networks of protected areas. One of the things we urgently need is an overall plan—I think everyone has touched on that—that has milestones and timelines, if we're going to finish the big job that everyone has acknowledged we have ahead of us, and that we haven't had in the past.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you.

My first question will be addressed to Mr. Lounds and Mr. Kendall. I'd like really quick answers, and if you could supplement those with written responses further to this, that would be appreciated.

Collaboration with indigenous peoples is emerging as a crucial area of improvement where our entire country needs to move forward, not just in terms of reconciliation, broadly writ, but in terms of conservation and objectives that we all share in that regard.

What do you think your organizations can do better in terms of indigenous collaboration to increase not only the percentage but the quality of conservation we achieve?

Mr. John Lounds: Thank you for the question.

People often think that where claims are being resolved, that is where we need to be focusing work, but actually there are many indigenous communities and first nations in southern Canada. Through the work we do, we have many examples of collaborative arrangements with the indigenous communities in those areas. Some help with our stewardship of our properties. Others have been involved and basically helped us conclude conservation arrangements.

As well, I mentioned the Labrador nature atlas, which not only involves the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador but also involved those Innu and other communities that are there. In thinking through what needs to be conserved, I think we can bring the conservation science aspects to the table and have that conversation that can be grounded both in western science and traditional knowledge.

We're looking to expand our work in these areas. Can we bring some of the tools that we've learned in terms of conservancy and figure out how that can be helpful going forward? We're looking forward to doing that, and I'd be happy to provide more on that.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Kendall.

Mr. Peter Kendall: There are two things on that.

First, we fund a lot of the ENGOs' work on building conservation capacity in first nation communities. I think that kind of work is very vital.

On the Earth Rangers side, I think our role can be to help children and families understand better the role of the first nation communities in conservation in this country. To that end, later this fall we are launching a mission for our members to do on indigenous traditional knowledge and the role this plays, and has played, in conservation across Canada. I think we need a lot more of that type of education as well.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you to both of you for those answers. My comments with respect to both your answers would be that one of the reasons you're both here is that your organizations are such leaders in the country. Whether it's Earth Rangers' 140,000 children members or whether it's the literally hundreds of millions of dollars that NCC is able to leverage, it's so important that you be part of this movement toward indigenous conservation, so I really do hope we can hear more about what you can do going forward.

I have an idea I'd like to put to the entire group. I'd like to start with Ms. Woodley.

Mr. Lounds mentioned the idea of an expert panel to help guide the federal government as we move forward in a national endeavour for enhanced conservation at multiple levels of government. That would sort of be an expert-driven endeavour. What do you think of the idea, and what has been done in the past that you think needs to be improved with regard to bringing about a national conservation council, a politically led body where all levels of government, including indigenous government, are brought together, maybe not dissimilar to the way the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment come together? This might be more broad.

What do you think of that kind of idea? Would it improve the situation in terms of coordination and collaboration?

● (1145)

Ms. Alison Woodley: Yes, I think it would. One of the challenges on the terrestrial protected areas front is that terrestrial protected areas are embedded in many different agencies across the country. There is not one federal-provincial-territorial body that is responsible for protected areas on the land in Canada, and that's one of the challenges. Some agencies are within the Canadian Parks Council, some are within environment ministries, and some are within natural resources ministries.

I harken back to 1992 when there was an initiative that brought all ministers responsible for protected areas together, and they jointly signed on to a statement of commitment on protected areas to complete protected areas systems by 2000. It leveraged a huge jump, doubling the size of the protected areas. They didn't get to the final goal exactly, but we need a similar body that involves all agencies. There are some murmurs about that starting, but yes, we do need it at the political level.

Mr. William Amos: My last question will be very quick. I know my time is running out. This is addressed to—

The Chair: Actually, your time is out. I hate to say that, but it is. My apologies.

We'll go to Mr. Stetski.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me start by thanking all three of the groups for the great work you've done for conservation and protected areas.

My first question will be for CPAWS. As you know, Canada is a signatory to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. The Aichi biodiversity targets require that we protect 10% of our marine territory and 17% of our land by 2020. So far we are at 10% of our land and 1.1% of our marine territory. How confident are you that the measures that the federal government has currently put in place will help reach those targets of 10% and 17%, and what more might the federal government do to help us get there, do you think?

Ms. Alison Woodley: On the land front, I think this idea of needing a council that really is responsible for this and drives it, led by the federal government, is critical. We are optimistic about the commitments that have been made. There are good commitments in the mandate letters, and there is a great commitment that came out of the U.S.-Canada statement that talks about going substantially beyond the targets. Now we need to put in place a process that brings everyone together to create the road map to get there. That is doable.

I would note that we also have to focus on the long-term goal of conserving nature, with these targets as a step forward. That is always what they've intended to be under the CBD and that's how we need to consider them. There are steps. We need to put the structures in and get the plan in place to get there. At the same time, I agree with Mr. Lounds that we need to be completing the things that are already in play on the ground by all jurisdictions and continue that work.

Ms. Sabine Jessen: On the marine side, I would echo what Alison has said, except to say that, while we appreciate the funding that was recently allocated for marine protected areas in the budget that will definitely help DFO increase collaboration among federal agencies and bring other levels of government together, there are still some missing pieces. When it comes to Environment Canada and its sites, it doesn't have a plan and it doesn't have new funding in the budget to work on the marine front, nor on the terrestrial front, I believe.

For Parks Canada, I did not hear that there is money for new sites or to explore the establishment of new sites as national marine conservation areas in the testimony that was given earlier this week. I think there are still gaps, and there is still work that needs to be done. Much has been put in place, but more will be needed.

● (1150)

Mr. Wayne Stetski: I have a question for Mr. Lounds of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, which does great work in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia. Nancy Newhouse has been very active. She is great. For two years I was manager of the East Kootenay conservation program, which coordinated the purchase of private land for conservation in the East Kootenays. There was a gap between the number of people who wanted to sell their land for conservation and the funding that was available, which might surprise a lot of people.

First, have you seen that gap across Canada, where there's more interest in selling private land for conservation than you have money to purchase it? Second, what more could the federal government do to help with that situation, if that is indeed the case?

Mr. John Lounds: Really, the only limiting factor on how much more we can do in the private landscape is funding, honestly.

That said, I don't think it's fully government's responsibility to do that. I think the communities need to step up. You need to have buy-in of the communities, like in the Kootenays, where there's actually been a levy undertaken. The communities bought into it big time that conservation needs to happen there. Unless you have that buy-in in the communities, you're not going to see long-term conservation happen. You have to have that buy-in, so that those types of things happen.

But the short answer is simply, yes, funding is the major constraint. That said, you also want to make sure that you're bringing your science to bear, so that you're choosing the most important places to invest. We're constantly sifting through the number of opportunities we have to determine which ones actually meet the highest and most number of criteria that we have for acquisition or securement.

We also try to encourage people to contribute not just through purchase but part-purchase, part-donation, and that's a large part of the work we do as well. We find people willing to give up some value of their property in order to make good things happen.

The Chair: You have one more minute.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: I'll go back to CPAWS for a minute. Without putting you on the spot too much, what do you think are the three priority areas that should become new national parks?

Ms. Alison Woodley: There are a couple in the pipe, so to speak. There's Thaidene Nëné, which is on its way to completion and will be done soon, hopefully. We're involved in that one.

The South Okanagan, of course, is one that has been under way for many years and is such a critically important priority.

Another one that is a really important priority that would be great to get is the Flathead Valley, which is an importation pinch point in the Yellowstone to Yukon area, and an incredibly important biodiversity area.

There are many others. I mean, they're all important, right? We need to do so much more. But those are three that are on my mind at the moment.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we turn to Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Thank you.

I'd like to begin by thanking each of you for being here and for the work that each of your organizations do. You really lead, in so many ways, on conservation in the country. I commend you for that.

It's always a question of where to start. Maybe we can start with CPAWS. We touched a bit on funding and what you've seen on park establishment. Has CPAWS ever taken a position on what level of funding they would like to see Parks Canada, as one specific organization, invest for both terrestrial and marine establishment?

We heard earlier this week that there's in the range of some $40 million for park establishment in this year's budget, but not necessarily a reference to marine conservation areas. Do you have any thoughts on the desired level of funding that you would like to see behind the park establishment program?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I can start.

Every year we do make budget recommendations as part of the Green Budget Coalition, which is a coalition of national environmental groups. Every year, for many years, we have been making recommendations, basically focused on what is needed to complete the existing system.

I don't have the numbers in my head. We have made recommendations that are far beyond the money that was allocated, because we recognize that this is the money that's needed to actually complete the system. We need to be moving on all fronts in order to get these things going, because they do take time.

Mr. John Aldag: Would that be a document you could get to us?

Ms. Alison Woodley: Absolutely. We've also made recommendations on ecological integrity and science-based management funding.

● (1155)

Mr. John Aldag: Sabine, do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms. Sabine Jessen: Yes, we do our work through the Green Budget Coalition, and making budget recommendations. I would echo what Alison has said, that this is the place to look. We're already starting to work on next year's budget.

Mr. John Aldag: Great. Thank you.

To the NCC, I'd like to find out your thoughts, from the work you do, on whether you have the right suite of tools from government to support the work you do for leveraging funds. Are there any things in the basket of tools you'd like to have available that you don't currently have access to and would help further acquisition for conservation purposes?

Mr. John Lounds: There are other tools that could be brought to bear on assisting with conservation in the private landscape. I hadn't expected this question today, but we can provide you with a few more of those.

One key aspect, though, of the work we do is that for every property we secure, whether through donation or purchase, we set aside an endowment fund. One of our guarantees needs to be that this will happen for the long term. While we're not self-insured like government is, we have to set aside these funds and manage them properly. One of the stipulations in our current agreement is that the endowment money is not to be matched by federal government money. It's matched in terms of whether we raise it, but no federal funds can go to that.

I think we've been able to work through that ourselves, but for land trusts and other smaller groups across the country, this one's a bigger issue. Through the eco-gift program and others, you have many smaller groups who are utilizing those federal programs for the tax benefits for the individuals who give, but we also want to make sure those groups are in place for the long term as well, so they can take care of those properties.

We're working to figure out how we do a better job with our land trust support efforts across the country, and that's a big part of what we think needs to be done. On the technical pieces that we've talked to finance about before, we could certainly provide you with those.

Mr. John Aldag: I'd be interested in seeing that, as I think the committee would. Part of the reason I raised it is that we had an experience recently in British Columbia where one of the smaller conservancies had to sell off property. That's always a concern when you have other organizations and other parcels of land being protected. How do we ensure they're part of that long-term piece?

Any thoughts you could provide to help deal with those types of issues would be appreciated.

Mr. John Lounds: We had the same concern and actually got involved. We identified the highest-priority properties from a conservation point of view. We now have taken those properties over to make sure they remain in conservation status.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

I want to go back to Alison. We heard from Parks Canada about its systems plan and the work that's happening on that. From a CPAWS perspective—I think we touched a bit on it, but perhaps you can comment a bit more specifically—what would the next phase of protected areas look like within the federal government once we achieve that initial round of conversation that's been set out through the Parks Canada systems plan? Where can we go next? What should we be looking to?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I agree with Mr. Lounds' comment that there isn't an integrated approach at the federal level and there should be.

The national parks systems plan specifically has served us well, but it's designed on a 1970s model. It is about representation only, and it predates the whole area of conservation science. We do need to build on that. It's important to have that representativity element of representing and having a park in each natural region of the country, but we need to build beyond that, because we now know that our parks need to be connected together if they're going to conserve nature. They need to be nested within broader landscapes and seascapes.

I think the next iteration needs to look at integrating, and in the face of climate change that becomes all the more important. Many of our parks are too small, and they need to be bigger. We need to build that ecosystem science into the next round, and then figure out how the various tools fit together in an integrated way. What is the role of national parks? What is the role of national wildlife areas? How do they fit together to have a complementary landscape approach to conservation, and then how do they fit with provincial, territorial, and indigenous tools? That's why we need these spatial plans, so we can figure out how they all fit together.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have to suspend this panel discussion to bring in the next panel. It's been an incredibly insightful opportunity to hear from you and what you have to share with us.

There were a lot of questions raised. There may be some more questions that didn't have a chance to be raised. Our clerk has offered that if you give them to her today, she can get them to the panel members.

I'm sure you would be interested in helping us get the answers to those questions.

You also identified a couple of manuals—I think around how much is enough—and a couple of books that you said we all have. I don't think we do all have them. I want to make sure....

They were emailed around to everybody?

● (1200)

Ms. Sabine Jessen: They were our reports.

The Chair: Okay, but you have some nice booklets there, and I don't know if you want to share them with us. I think it would be kind of nice to make notes in the margins and so on, if anybody wants them. I wouldn't mind having one. If you would like to share those with us, that would be great.

Okay, go ahead.

Mr. John Lounds: Shall we send the material to you or the clerk?

The Chair: Everything for the committee goes through our clerk, Cynara Corbin.

Thank you all again, and thank you for joining us via video conference.

We'll just suspend for a few minutes while we bring the other panel members up.

● (1200)

(Pause)

● (1200)

The Chair: I'd like to have everybody take their seats please. We're going to run out of time for questioning if we don't get going with the panel. You will all be very disappointed with me when I cut the second panel off with a round of questioning.

Welcome to our second panel for today. We have three groups with us today. I have Steven Nitah.

You're going to have to help me. Please say your name for me so that I can say it right.

Chief Steven Nitah (Lead negotiator of Thaidene Nene, Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation): It's "Nee-tah".

The Chair: Okay, welcome and thank you for joining us.

From the Indigenous Leadership Initiative of the International Boreal Conservation Campaign, we have Dave Porter and Valerie Courtois.

Is that how I should say your name?

Ms. Valerie Courtois (Director, Indigenous Leadership Initiative of the International Boreal Conservation Campaign): It's "Koor-twa".

The Chair: Thank you very much.

And we have Alan Latourelle.

Thank you all very much for joining us today. We'll get started with Mr. Nitah.

● (1205)

Chief Steven Nitah: [Witness speaks in Dene]

In my language, I just said thank you very much to all of my relations for giving me the time to present to you today.

My name is Steven Nitah. I'm the lead negotiator for the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation in our negotiations and discussions with both the Government of Canada and the Government of Northwest Territories towards the establishment of Thaidene Nëné as a national park reserve.

The Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation has been advancing this initiative to foster ecological integrity, cultural continuity, and economic sustainability in the core of its homeland at the East Arm of the Great Slave Lake. This landscape is called Thaidene Nëné, "Land of the Ancestors".

Thaidene Nëné includes an abrupt transition from boreal forest to tundra, including the dramatic cliffs, islands, and waters of the East Arm of Great Slave Lake, and canyons and falls of many clear water rivers. Part of the largest roadless landscape in North America, this still intact ecosystem features some of the cleanest and deepest freshwater in the world, and some of the last free-ranging migratory caribou herds.

The Lutsel K'e Denesoline use Thaidene Nëné every day for subsistence, recreation, and cultural practice. Our connection to this area is best articulated in our Thaidene Nëné vision statement which was agreed to both by Parks Canada and Lutsel K'e.

The vision statement reads as follows:

> Thaidene Nene is the heart of the homeland and sacred place of the Lutsel K'e Denesoline. It is where the ancestors of the Lutsel K'e Denesoline laid down the sacred [and] ethical and practical foundations of the Denesoline way of life.
>
> Carrying these traditions into the future, the Lutsel K'e Denesoline have the right to promote their culture, practice their relationship with the land and water, and protect the territory upon which [the] culture and relationship depend. Protection of Thaidene Nene means preserving the environmental and cultural integrity of a homeland fundamental to a material well-being and cultural identity.
>
> As...keepers of Thaidene Nene, the Lutsel K'e Denesoline have the responsibility to act as stewards of the land and...host to visitors.

The Lutsel K'e Dene are the caretakers of Thaidene Nëné. We have the responsibility to protect this land for the future generations, and to celebrate and share Thaidene Nëné with all Canadians.

Our vision for Thaidene Nëné is informed by our understanding of our peace and friendship relationship with the crown. We approach the protection and management of Thaidene Nëné as an equal partnership between our governments, with Canada and the Northwest Territories, and Lutsel K'e, where we both are bringing to the table respective expertise and responsibilities. We seek to share our world-class culture and landscape, and a heritage that is critical to our way of life as indigenous people, and indeed to all Canadians.

Conservation as reconciliation. An important national precedent will be set if our Thaidene Nëné vision is achieved. While historically, protected areas in Canada have been established only under the auspices of crown legislation and authority, we are well down the road towards a bold and precedent-setting governance partnership between the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation and the Government of Canada and the Government of Northwest Territories. Our shared objectives, as expressed in the establishment agreement initialled between negotiators for Parks Canada and Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, is for the two parties to share authority on all aspects of Thaidene Nëné, including management decision-making and operational responsibilities.

We are also working with the Government of Northwest Territories towards this designation for the portions of Thaidene Nëné that will be protected under territorial parks legislation. Both these partnerships are being advanced on a government-to-government basis and in the spirit of reconciliation.

Historically, crown initiatives to establish parks to undertake on-the-land conservation programs have resulted in, at worst, the alienation of indigenous peoples from their traditional territories, and at best, limited opportunities for jobs working for another government.

● (1210)

We think there is a better way. A new model championed by the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation will promote the responsibility and capacity of indigenous peoples to work as stewards in their traditional territories, using their own ways of knowing and doing. They would be employed by the Lutsel K'e government and work side by side with the Government of Canada to implement our joint vision and management plan for Thaidene Nëné.

We view this as a critical contribution on the path toward reconciliation between indigenous peoples and Canada. We view Thaidene Nëné as a means to maintain and promote our unique indigenous ways of knowing and doing. Initially, protection of the landscape necessary for our indigenous ways to have an opportunity to be expressed is critical. We must include whole watersheds, culturally important lands, and critical wildlife habitats and ecosystems within the protected area.

I should stress that protecting the land does not mean excluding people from it. As Dene people, we have always shared our lands and our way of life with others. We intend for that to continue. We have assurances that our constitutionally protected rights and traditional ways of life will be respected. We also intend that there be provisions for longstanding northerners to carry on subsistence and recreational activities in accordance with conservation and park management plans, as has been done recently in Labrador for the Mealy Mountains Akami-Uapishk National Park Reserve.

It is also in the context of Thaidene Nëné as a conservation landscape that our deep cultural knowledge can be given a contemporary relevance in informing and connecting Canadians to our north. Our community will provide the human connections, local context, and historical depth for visitors' experiences. We are also uniquely placed to integrate our traditional knowledge with science for the purpose of environmental monitoring and management, including providing the deep historical baseline for climate change and adaptation.

Thaidene Nëné is uniquely situated to help demonstrate how we can break the cycle of poverty and dependency that characterizes many indigenous communities in Canada. We view Thaidene Nëné as an opportunity to realize economic reconciliation. Our people love their culture and their land, and seek avenues to demonstrate their value in the contemporary world. Showcasing our stories and our special places will be of interest to visitors from around the world. Thaidene Nëné is not just about conservation. It is about a viable economic future for Lutsel K'e as the gateway to Thaidene Nëné and its operational and service centre.

In order to realize our responsibilities in Thaidene Nëné and to catalyze an associated conservation economy, Lutsel K'e First Nation has established a Thaidene Nëné trust fund. Income generated from the trust fund through interest and investment will be allocated to our management and operational responsibilities, as outlined in the establishing agreement and through related education and training. The trust fund will also support the ongoing promotion of our indigenous culture and will help catalyze the conservation economy. The Thaidene Nëné trust fund is fundamental to the self-determination of the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nations and the responsible governance of Thaidene Nëné. Our initial capitalization objective is $30 million. We have raised $15 million that is dependent on matching funds from the Government of Canada. We invite the Government of Canada to match our commitment of $15 million to the Thaidene Nëné trust fund.

We are nearing the finish line with Thaidene Nëné. While we have a draft Thaidene Nëné establishment agreement, Lutsel K'e and Canada must still finalize boundaries and come to terms with respect to the trust fund. We hope we can together put the finishing touches on this great initiative in the coming year and jointly announce the establishment of Thaidene Nëné for Canada's 150th birthday in 2017.

I thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to present the Thaidene Nëné vision.

Mahsi cho.

The Chair: We thank you very much for sharing that vision with us.

Next, if we could have Valerie, I believe you're up. Thank you.

Ms. Valerie Courtois: Thank you, committee, for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Before I begin, I just want to acknowledge the unceded Algonquin territory that we're located on and thank them for the care that they've shown in caring for this land and allowing us to be here.

I am Valerie and I come from Mashteuiatsh in Quebec and I live in Labrador currently. I am the director of the indigenous leadership initiative, which is a partner in the international boreal conservation campaign. What we do is we help indigenous nations strengthen their nationhood in order to have results of good management systems on the land. Strong nations make strong decisions on lands, and that's what we're about. As an international boreal conservation campaign, we seek to have the boreal forest be not only the best conserved but the best managed terrestrial ecosystem in the world, and Canada has a great heritage in its boreal forest.

We're here to talk to you today about a national initiative called the indigenous guardians network. What we're proposing and the idea that we're proposing is to create a national network of moccasins on the ground who are responsible for not only monitoring and watching out for their own lands, but feeding that back into our decision-making and our own management system related to those lands. We have clear visions and aspirations for the future of these lands, and the guardians program represents a way of expressing that vision and those aspirations.

What are guardians? They're essentially the eyes and ears of communities on the lands. I directed a program for almost a decade with the Innu nation in Labrador and our favourite saying was, "Today's guardians are tomorrow's ministers." It's really about finding a way of expressing your own governance and your own systems of management in a modern context of a shared future with governments and other Canadians.

This idea is not new in Canada. In fact, there are 30 such programs that exist across the country. They include the Innu nation program that I'm involved with, but also the Ni Hat'ni Dene program that is associated with the Thaidene Nëné proposal, the Gwaii Haanas watchmen—I have a colleague here, Miles Richardson, who is very familiar with that program—and the coastal guardian watchmen network in British Columbia, which is a well-established network. These programs have shown and proven that when there are guardians in place, the conversation around not only resource development but also conservation is a much richer and deeper one.

We have a vision that all indigenous peoples across this nation should have the ability and the opportunity to avail themselves of such programs. We think that this would create a real context for a deep conversation on what nation-to-nation management of lands and our shared future looks like with respect to lands.

We've also been inspired by a program in Australia. This is called the working on country program. It's been running for just over eight years now. The Australian government has invested over half a billion dollars in these positions, and the results have been quite remarkable. They now employ nearly 800 full-time rangers who actively manage lands across Australia. The results of the programs, to their credit, have been quite remarkable.

They include a marked reduction of rates of incarceration of indigenous peoples, a reduction of rates of violence against women, a reduction of rates of obesity and diabetes, all these amazing social indicators, in addition to the obvious land management results that come from programs like this that include programs around the management of feral animals, very interesting fire-management regimes in Australia, species at risk, parks, indigenous-protected areas, and other such services. I could go on.

We are here this week meeting with various representatives from Parliament, ministers, and other government officials to discuss not only our vision but also to work with government in forming this idea. We really think that this could be a path to reconciliation and, as we look at the various mandate letters and recommendations under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we see that a program like this could really help government achieve some of its objectives with respect to reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

● (1220)

Finally, I'd like to thank you all for your time and to acknowledge my ancestors in the Innu culture who have helped guide me with respect to how we do right by our lands and our own cultural responsibilities to them.

Thank you.

The Chair: I want to thank you very much as well for taking the time to present to us. This is a very important aspect of our discussions around the table and we're grateful that you're here.

Is there anyone else from your organization who wants to speak?

Mr. Dave Porter (Senior Advisor, Indigenous Leadership Initiative of the International Boreal Conservation Campaign): Madam Chair, I think Valerie has done a great job of laying out what we want to talk to the committee about here today; and in the interests of having greater engagement with members of the committee, I'll defer to our next speaker.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

Mr. Latourelle.

Mr. Alan Latourelle (As an Individual): Madam Chair, I would like to acknowledge the Algonquin people for allowing us to conduct business on their traditional territory.

It is an honour for me to share with the committee my personal views, based on several years of experience, on a subject that I am very passionate about, Canada's protected areas.

Before I go to my notes, I will just tell you that those notes were prepared without discussions with other members today, but that, as you will see, there are a lot of similarities in the key points that I would like to make.

As someone who has been involved in the international protected areas community for close to 20 years, I will share with the committee today my thoughts on how, as a country, we can build on our strengths to achieve new heights, not only in conservation, but also in healing our relationship with Canada's indigenous people.

My presentation will focus on four key points: first, the need to celebrate and communicate Canada's current international leadership in protected areas management; second, the need to have a clear and agreed-upon baseline of our current conservation results that is consistent with our COP 10 commitment; third, what we need to do to develop a national plan to demonstrate continued international leadership; and fourth, some suggestions on how to achieve our targets, and innovative approaches that you may want to consider.

First, in terms of where we are as a country internationally, the last 15 years have seen one of the most significant national park expansion programs in the history of our country, and this was achieved with the full involvement of indigenous peoples, demonstrating international leadership. As mentioned by a previous witness, Parks Canada is implementing the largest ecological restoration program in its history. For example, World Wildlife Fund International has recognized global leadership actions such as the reintroduction of bison and black-footed ferret in Grasslands National Park.

Furthermore, in 2012, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, IUCN, released new guidelines on ecological restoration for protected areas that were modelled on Canada's own national approach to ecological restoration. Canada is also the only country whose Parliament is provided with a comprehensive science-based assessment of the state of its national parks.

Canada is demonstrating global leadership by implementing programs to inspire new generations to connect with nature, thereby developing a strong conservation ethic in future leaders. Canada has also demonstrated global leadership by implementing consistently across its system of national parks a consultative and co-operative model that ensures indigenous peoples have an effective voice in the management of protected areas.

Finally, several provincial governments, indigenous communities, and organizations such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada have made bold commitments or taken bold actions related to new protected areas.

These are only a few examples of our country's international leadership. I think it is important because, as we look at the future, we really need to build on the strengths of the past and the significant leadership that Canada has demonstrated internationally on protected areas management, and be proud of that.

As we prepare to celebrate the 150th anniversary of our nation, we need to stand tall and proud and celebrate the exceptional contributions we have made to conservation internationally, while charting a bold and inspiring path for the future.

The first step, from my perspective, is to have a clear and agreed-upon baseline of our current conservation results that is consistent with the COP 10 commitment, as has also been mentioned by previous witnesses. As stated in a 2014 United Nations Environment Programme report, Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 aspires to a global conservation system that is built not only from protected areas managed or governed by governments, but also from, and I quote, “other effective area-based conservation measures”. It further states that “the extent of 'other' areas, their distribution and the degree to which they complement the global system of protected areas are all uncertain, and until this information is available, complete progress towards Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 cannot be accurately determined.”

I would suggest that what this means within a Canadian context is that the federal, provincial, territorial, and indigenous governments need to agree on a common definition and criteria of “other areas” that should be included in our national report, and communicate that very broadly to allow sufficient time for private, not-for-profit, and indigenous communities to submit their data for reporting purposes. This may sound trivial, but it is critical, from my perspective, in order to ensure that indigenous-controlled lands and other land-owners receive the recognition that they deserve in Canada's future reports.

● (1225)

Secondly, it needs to be acknowledged that the vast majority of the new land-based protected areas that need to established to meet our objectives are provincially or territorially owned crown lands that are the traditional territory of indigenous peoples. Therefore, for us to meet our long-term objectives and the targets, any national plan will only be successful if there is concrete political commitment of these landowners and federal leadership.

In essence, to achieve Target 11 will require a strong political push federally and provincially.

Thirdly, if Canada is to retain its international leadership role, which I mentioned previously, it cannot just meet the top 10 targets. I'm sure that I may be stressing out my former colleagues here today, but we have been what I would call an A student in the international protected areas communities for the past century and we should not be satisfied with a D minus passing grade in 2020 by simply meeting the 17% and 10% targets.

If you equate that with the Olympics, on the protected areas we've been as a country on the podium for the last 100 years. We want to stay on the podium for the next 100 years. We have in the past showed and we must continue to show the world what can be accomplished when a country takes bold action to protect a significant part of its territory for future generations.

To achieve this objective I would suggest that first we aim for a 20% to 25% land-based protection by 2020 and 12% to 15% of marine protection; that a national plan, which has been mentioned previously by several other witnesses, be developed in 2016 and endorsed by ministers of all jurisdictions, with key measurable milestones that are reported publicly annually in order to track progress but more importantly to celebrate success.

The 20% to 25% is achievable if we account for the indigenous-controlled lands and other lands that are currently not accounted for in the reports I've seen so far.

I would suggest also that the plan include proposed new government-managed protected areas. The plan should include private and not-for profit conservation lands expansion and lands identified as of cultural and natural significance to indigenous communities as part of their land use plans, especially in northern Canada.

As a practical example, I'll use the land claim agreement with the Labrador Inuit Association. There is a significant component of land in Labrador that is Inuit-controlled lands. We should acknowledge the leadership of the Inuit people and represent that in our reports internationally.

Significant and critical funding has been identified in the 2016 federal budget to support the expansion of the system of protected areas; however, meeting the objective I proposed earlier will be challenging and will require a real national effort. My humble suggestions are that the federal government first needs to look at streamlining the protected areas establishment process. I'll just give you a few examples.

The federal mineral and energy resource assessment policy needs to be modified to reflect territorial devolution agreements. I'm not sure whether that has been done or not. I just looked at the web, and it's still on the website, so this may or may not be appropriate as an example, but it's one approach, and indigenous traditional knowledge could support such a program.

In closing I want to thank the committee for inviting me. The work that you do is important and will shape the future of protected areas in Canada and our relationship with indigenous peoples for the next century by ensuring that the seascapes and landscapes that define our nation are protected forever, so that future generations can experience the natural and indigenous diversity of our great country.

Thank you.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you all very much.

I'm going to open the floor to questions, and we'll start with Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: I want to thank the panellists for coming today.

For a brief context, I was with Parks Canada for over 30 years.

I want to commend Mr. Latourelle for the leadership he's shown, the leadership we continue seeing, and—as I meet with government officials—the leadership that Parks Canada is recognized for in its relationships with indigenous communities. I know that was very much under your leadership, and thank you for that.

For Steven, it's interesting. I worked in Wood Buffalo National Park in the 1980s. I was a resident of Fort Smith for about six years. At that point, the whole dream of Thaidene Nëné was the beginning of an idea, and I know it's taken 30 years. My career and my life were spent watching the relationship with that community. It's exciting for me hear your comments that things are moving along there. I commend the community for its insight and vision, and the care that has been taken over that time to get to this point in the creation of that space. It is an honour to hear you speak today. Thank you for the value and for your comments.

With the work I've done with Parks Canada, I've travelled through Gwaii Haanas and I've seen the Haida watchmen program. I was active for a year as superintendent at Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, and I saw the great programs through the guardian programs there. I commend you for the work you're doing, and I would love to see those types of programs growing across the country in many different protected areas. It is a wonderful afternoon to be spending with you, so thank you.

With those comments, I would like to start briefly with Alan, and then I'm going to move to Steven.

I am curious. You have given us some great ideas about protected areas. Once we complete the systems plan—and I have this dream that maybe we could get there by 2020, although I recognize that relationships with our partners, particularly indigenous communities, take time and in many cases it's decades—do you have any thoughts on the next phase of what the park system may look like once you reach completion of the existing 1970s plan? Do you have any thoughts on where that could go?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: I think, as has been mentioned previously, that conservation science has evolved quite significantly since the plan. My advice to the committee would be to keep going on the plan, get it done, and then let's look at what's the next phase.

That's why I'm suggesting an indigenous cultural lands program. I think there's a significant amount of land, probably bigger than the national parks system, of indigenous-controlled lands through land claim agreements and other mechanisms. I don't think they're getting the recognition they deserve, and I think they need the support to manage those lands and ensure the long-term survival of cultures. For the next step, my advice would be more on the indigenous cultural lands types of program.

I think the other aspect is that, as a country, we need to look at urban areas. There's huge urban sprawl. We have the Rouge National Urban Park, and I think there is a long-term need for an urban national park system across Canada.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you. That's a nice transition to Steven.

I want to ask if you could share what you would find to be best practices as you've gone through this process for park establishment and dealing with government.

You touched on some of it in your comments, but I am wondering if you have advice for us about processes and approaches that you would like to see supported, which other indigenous communities could benefit from, or if there are pitfalls or things we should avoid as we work with communities on—moving toward what Mr. Latourelle is talking about—indigenous cultural lands program or other protected areas. What works for Thaidene Nëné, and what didn't work that we should be aware of? Any thoughts you could offer would be appreciated.

● (1235)

Chief Steven Nitah: I can certainly try to answer some of those questions.

If you look at Thaidene Nëné, it has a long history for sure. The interest of Canada in creating a national park in that area was first expressed back in the late 1960s or early 1970s, but at that point in time, just as with the creation of particular areas like Wood Buffalo National Park, the laws of the country were not conducive for indigenous governments agreeing to national parks, including the use on that proposed Lutsel K'e national park at that time. Section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982 gave us some comfort to move forward and explore the possibility of entering into a relationship with Canada through Parks Canada.

Making resources available to indigenous governments and communities to go and explore what's out there and best practices is one key investment that Canada can make, but I also have to acknowledge the leadership of Mr. Latourelle on the Thaidene Nëné file. It takes leadership from the Government of Canada to give comfort to aboriginal governments to move forward together.

Thaidene Nëné is very similar to Gwaii Haanas. We built Thaidene Nëné on Gwaii Haanas, which is the closest thing in Canada to a government-to-government relationship in the management and operations of that protected area. It took a little while to get the Government of Canada back to that state of mind. I think what took the longest time was bringing Canada to that state of mind where we could work together from a government-to-government perspective. That's one aspect.

The other very important aspect is that we have been able to have our own funds that we have control over. That's where the trust fund comes in. The trust fund gives comfort to Lutsel K'e to get into a government-to-government relationship with Canada wherein we have our own financial resources to contribute to the operations and management of Thaidene Nëné and not depend on the Government of Canada or the Government of the Northwest Territories on an annual basis to provide such resources. We have seen in the past where, if the crown has controlled the dollars, it eventually takes over using that control.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm sorry that we have to end that because, obviously, there are a lot more questions to be asked and a lot of information to share with us.

Mr. Eglinski.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): I'd like to welcome our three presenters, especially the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nations.

Steven, thank you for coming.

I'd also like to thank the indigenous leadership program. Valerie and Alan, thank you. Valerie and Alan, thank you.

I have questions for Steven and Alan. I will start with Alan. I'd like you to be fairly quick, because I think I want to get a little bit more out of Steven than yourself.

I noted that you spoke very favourably of what Canada has done over the last number of years with significant increases in parks, the different programs, and the different developments for our national parks. In my riding of Yellowhead, I encompass all of Jasper National Park; I encompass half of Banff National Park. I have Willmore Wilderness Park and I'm very familiar with the Muskwa-Kechika area in northern British Columbia, having spent time in all of those areas.

I noticed, when I was reading CPAWS' handout and listening to you, that there seems to be quite a disconnect in ideas and thoughts. I believe that I saw from you that there was a need for us to be progressive with our national parks but to be very careful to protect things. I wonder if I can just get a comment on that.

Mr. Alan Latourelle: I think we have to go back to the dedication clause of national parks. They're dedicated to the people of Canada for their use, enjoyment, and education but in a way that leaves them unimpaired. I think in the Government of Canada that's the responsibility of the minister.

If I go back to the commissioner's report on cultural integrity, that confirms that Parks Canada—again, I'm not giving you inside information, because it's public information—was meeting our obligation under the act. Recreational activities have been and will always been debated. It's going to be a debate 50 years from now. I think the issue for me is that, again, the commissioner reviewed the recreational activities and confirmed that cultural integrity was seriously considered and the first priority in the processes of the agency, so I would recommend that you may want to look at the commissioner's report and the specific section on that.

I think that, in Canada, there are several parks that have no commercial development at all, more than the vast majority of them. I think there are a lot of opportunities for Canadians. Look at northern Canada, for example. There's a unique opportunity for Canadians to experience Inuit culture, so it's not only about nature but also indigenous cultures. I think that's something we should be pursuing as a country.

● (1240)

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Steven, thank you for the Thaidene Nëné reserve. I was at your grand opening, and we met last year when you guys were presenting here. What a beautiful part of the world it is, and I want to thank you for what you're doing there.

As Mr. Latourelle mentioned, I think that's the future of Canada, that we take these areas of land and put them under the management of indigenous people.

From having talked with you last year, I know that you've lived there most of your life. With the Aichi program under which Canada needs to reach 17% of its land in parks, we're basically going to have to double what we have now. It's not that far off doubling what we have now, and there is going to be a need to look at the impact that's going to impose on aboriginal communities. I'm looking at the ability of your members to hunt, fish, and trap in areas that we may want to look at for conservation purposes.

I want to get your comments on what level of use you think your people need. Maybe it could be white people trapping in certain areas that we may put into reserve. Do you feel that we can put these conservation areas into place while still being able to have the land utilized by the people, especially indigenous people?

Chief Steven Nitah: The indigenous people of this country have rights identified in section 35. In 1982 that was an empty box. It's starting to fill up pretty well. It's been defined. To ask indigenous people to give up those rights for the sake of conservation may not be the best approach, in my opinion. That's not to say that indigenous people are against conservation. We have been conservationist people for eons, but I don't think it's for parks or Parks Canada to make that determination.

The way we are approaching it in the Northwest Territories is that the first nations governments that I represent will work with the Government of Northwest Territories, and they will come up with a political decision on what conservation is going to be and where. If it falls within Thaidene Nëné, then we just have to respect that decision of the political leaders.

That's how I would approach that.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: I still want you to answer a little further on that. I believe that we need to give people the opportunity to still use the land, especially indigenous people, and what I was trying to get from you is whether you see a need for us to include that, to give you people the right to still use the land even though we put it into protected areas?

Chief Steven Nitah: I guarantee that you're not going to get any support from indigenous governments if you want to create conservation areas by excluding their ability to use that area. From the Thaidene Nëné perspective, it's built right into the agreement. In our discussions with Canada and the Government of Northwest Territories, we've been representing the interests of non-indigenous northerners who have used that area so that they can continue to use that area as long as it's a viable option for them.

The Chair: We're out of time. That was good questioning.

All right, we're sharing time here, with three minutes for Mr. Amos and three minutes for Mr. Fisher.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you to all of the witnesses. This is a real privilege to have this opportunity to speak with you. I would also like to acknowledge that we are on Algonquin traditional territory. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to represent them in the House of Commons.

I'd like, first, to congratulate Mr. Nitah and his community's inspiring leadership around Thaidene Nëné. I appreciate that this is a project that was the twinkle in the eye of federal civil servants way back when, but it wasn't until there was real community leadership from Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation that we really saw this move forward. That's because, at the end of the day, it has to be the indigenous peoples who drive this forward, who determine that they want this for their own reasons—and in this, I think you are right, that co-management is a huge part of it.

I'd also like to quickly thank you for allowing me to spend time in your homeland. It's because of the nine days of solo canoeing with my wife there that I got her blessing to represent Pontiac and to move forward with the political project, so it's been a really important aspect of my life that I owe to your community.

I'd also like to mention that I really do hope that the Algonquin Nation in western Quebec can learn from the experience of the the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, and I hope to be able to build upon that with you going forward.

The idea of uniting around an approach toward reconciliation that is premised on conservation, on cultural preservation, on economic development achieved through co-management of some protected areas is a fabulous idea. I really hope that we can build on that.

Earlier we spoke with our witnesses about the idea of a national conservation body that would bring together federal, provincial, municipal, and indigenous groups to advise on a whole-of-Canada approach.

● (1245)

The Chair: You have less than one minute, Will.

Mr. William Amos: How can we get there? I would invite both Ms. Courtois and Steven Nitah to comment orally.

Chief Steven Nitah: I hope to see more Canadians visiting Thaidene Nëné and making life-changing decisions while they're visiting our beautiful territory.

I think there's room in this country for such an organization through which we could dialogue on best practices and move forward together. Just recently, a couple of weeks ago, I was in Banff and Canmore, where there was a national parks summit discussion. The parks summit was a gathering of invited representatives who are in the conservation business, whether it's with provincial, territorial, or federal protected areas. That dialogue started there, and I think it's leading towards a conference scheduled for April of next year. Through such a dialogue, a body such as you envision can be created to help guide Canada and all Canadians, including indigenous governments, towards reaching the 25% target, if that's the goal.

Thank you.

The Chair: I apologize for having to keep cutting you off. There's just not enough time for the discussion.

Ms. Fisher, please.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you, folks. Time is so tight, and that's a real shame today. There's so much I'd like to ask, but I'm going to take my very short time to ask Mr. Latourelle a question that I wanted to ask of the earlier witnesses.

I'd like to know more about the quality of the land that we're seeking to protect. I get that we have targets, and I get that we have goals and that we want to hit certain percentages, but how do we ensure that we're protecting the proper land, the most diverse land, the best land, rather than just saying “Wow, we hit 17%. Woohoo!”? What is in place?

I'm sorry; this isn't the best question to aim towards you. Again, I wanted to ask it this morning, but what do we have for a safeguard? What do we have for a criteria base so that we can make sure that we get the most diverse, high-quality land for protected areas?

Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'll be done.

Mr. Alan Latourelle: Madam Chair, I would say that we're fortunate in Canada for two reasons. First, if you look at the national park system plan, it is a science-based plan and approach to identifying candidate areas. Ecological integrity, for example, is one of the key components of identifying the potential lands for national parks as part of the national policy.

I would say that equally important is that as part of the land claim agreement process or land claim negotiation process, indigenous people get to identify the lands that are important for their cultural values. Often, the vast majority of those lands are also the critical lands for conservation purposes.

That's why I was proposing an indigenous cultural lands program, because I think that with the two key components as anchors in Canada, supported equally by land trusts—for example, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, which is focusing also on some of the key areas—we will meet not only of the quantity but also the quality of lands that we need to achieve our conservation objective. It will never be perfect, but I think then the next step is really how we link those. How do we ensure the linkage, creating a network, so we don't only have islands of protected areas?

● (1250)

The Chair: Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): I appreciate your all being here and listening to you this morning. It's very good. I appreciate your information.

Mr. Latourelle, I think you have a lot of experience, so I'll ask you a couple of questions.

We've heard a lot about silos this morning, and differentiated lands and programs. I think part of the challenge we've had is those silos and everybody's specific interests and maybe not having one united interest.

Would you care to comment about the siloing and how you would solve that issue?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: The key to our success long term, I would say, is twofold. First, political leadership at the territorial-provincial-national level working towards one common vision is, I think, critical. Otherwise, you can put all the money you want into protected areas, but if you can't establish them because they're under provincial control, you're not going to achieve the objective.

Secondly, as I have mentioned on numerous occasions, I think engaging and involving indigenous leaders from the outset is critical to our success.

Mr. Martin Shields: You also mentioned urban areas, which gets me to another point. No one today, except you, has mentioned municipalities. Municipalities have a huge role to play as a level of government, but no one wants to recognize them today.

Mr. Alan Latourelle: Other witnesses have commented on the criteria that we should define in reporting on what are conservation lands, and I think there are some important ones municipally.

We want to make sure it's stringent enough that it doesn't dilute Canada's credibility and the quality of our conservation. Having said that, if I look at the 10% a lot of people are using—and I look at it as an individual—I don't see any lands, for example, from the Labrador Inuit that are in the controlled lands. I don't see a lot of the Nature Conservancy lands. I don't see a lot of land trust lands.

I'm saying that we need to take a step back, take account, and celebrate what we're doing exceptional work on internationally, but it shouldn't dilute our program. We should still have both programs going forward.

Mr. Martin Shields: I appreciate that.

Valerie, you're networking, and I understand that. You talked about the "moccasin telegraph" that we used in my generation. Could you describe what it would look like? I appreciate what you're talking about, but if I was to tell somebody, could you tell me in your words what it would look like?

Ms. Valerie Courtois: Absolutely, and I'm hoping with your indulgence that I can ask my colleague, Miles Richardson, who ran the Haida watchmen program, to join me in describing what this could look like.

From an Innu point of view, I ran the program for Innu Nation, who had guardians watching Voisey's Bay, which is a large nickel mine in northern Labrador. They ensured that the project achieved not only sensible management of lands, but also what was set out in the impact benefit agreements and environmental protection plans that were negotiated with the Innu Nation.

They have programs in forestry, hydro, and highway development. The full suite of programs managed by the Innu Nation through this guardians approach allowed for the Innu Nation to have a deeper and richer understanding of what was coming down the line, and how they needed to be involved and lead to determine that projects happen in a way that is not only of benefit to the proponents, but also of benefit to the Innu people.

I'll leave the rest for Miles.

The Chair: Yes, I think we have one more person joining us as a witness, and we have one minute to hear what you have to say. I'm sorry that we're running out of time. I'm really trying to give everyone a chance to ask their questions, so please share with us in the short time what you have to offer.

● (1255)

Mr. Miles Richardson (Senior Advisor, Indigenous Leadership Initiative of the International Boreal Conservation Campaign): I'm Miles Richardson. I'm with the Gwaii Haanas agreement, which you've been referring to. I was the president of the day of the Haida Nation. I am a signatory to that agreement.

Essential to that agreement was our Haida Gwaii watchmen program, which is our people out on the ground. Here, you're trying to front-end a joint initiative, a nation-to-nation initiative, between Canada and respective first nations across the country based on a common vision for conservation and responsible stewardship, and a common commitment to celebrating the natural and cultural features of each area.

In my day, we did this unilaterally as the Haida Nation. We figured that if we were going to survive, we had to uphold our responsibility as a nation to our place on this earth, so we asked for volunteers. We asked our people to go out there and understand and explain to visitors our policies as a nation for our lands. It was well received by visitors who came there, but not by governments. Governments had different views. They wanted to log the area. They wanted to bring in all kinds of other things contrary to our policies.

We established a nation-to-nation relationship. It's expressed in the Gwaii Haanas agreement, but we have a disagreement over sovereignty, ownership, and jurisdiction. I hope that with this program we could agree on a nation-to-nation basis that we're all here to stay and figure out how we're going to reimagine and coexist in these protected areas. That's the opportunity we have today.

We came at it from an opposite perspective 22 years ago, and we raised a pole in Gwaii Haanas two years ago to celebrate. The miracle is that this nation-to-nation relationship between Haida and Canada has existed, but that's through tough work. If we can build a new, mutually respectful framework, we can do that, and hopefully we don't have to wait until Elizabeth May is prime minister to do that. I think if we're serious about a nation-to-nation relationship, we can do that right now.

The Chair: I can assure you that we are serious with this government. Thank you very much for sharing that.

We have one more questioner, Mr. Stetski.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: My question will be for Alan, but I wanted to take a minute to recognize Miles Richardson and the watchmen program in Gwaii Haanas. It really is a model that has helped keep Haida Gwaii in the condition that it is in.

I also want to thank the first nations that have moccasins on the ground and in the water associated with the Great Bear Rainforest as volunteers. I understand that if they were not there, basically there would be no protection of that incredible area, as well. Thank you for your interest.

Alan, as CEO of Parks Canada from 2002 to 2015, you were given the unenviable task of cutting funding for national parks. I was a manager with BC Parks for many years. I share your pain.

My question is, what should Parks Canada's priorities be for restoring or enhancing funding?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: To be fair to the government, I think it would be inappropriate for me to really get into the organization of Parks Canada.

What I will say, which is on the public record, is that, when I started in 2002, the budget of Parks Canada was $395 million. In the estimates that you have reviewed recently, it was $1.1 billion. That gives you a sense of how the budget has evolved over time in Parks Canada.

Regardless of governments, the priorities should always be about clearly achieving strong international leadership in conservation, about connecting people to nature, getting Canadians to experience their national treasures, but also about ensuring that indigenous voices are heard in our protected areas in Canada.

Those are the fundamentals of who we are as a country and why we are international leaders. It is because we do the three elements.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Steven, I know you touched on it earlier but, just in summary, what do you think the keys to making this new relationship work are?

Chief Steven Nitah: I think we have to go back to the early days of contact in the relationship. It was recognized at that time that we needed to work together to survive, and I think we still have to do that going forward, nation to nation, in a relationship based on the treaties, whether it is the numbered treaties—the historical treaties—or the current treaties that have been negotiated.

Every Canadian has a treaty in this country, whether you are indigenous or non-indigenous. If you live in Algonquin territory, there is a treaty with Algonquins. Therefore, as Canadians, you have to respect and support that treaty, so that this government respects those treaties.

Going forward, if we live by those treaties and not try to overpower one another, then I think we could work together and create a nation that is going to be the envy of the world.

● (1300)

The Chair: Okay. We are out of time. I regret that, because the conversation is very rich and very important. I really value the time you have given us today.

If there is anything else from the discussion that you think you haven't had a chance to share with us and would like to, then—

Mr. Dave Porter: We need to have a serious discussion with Parks Canada about zone 7. I was involved in the construction of the Muskwa-Kechika agreement. It was a provincial initiative. We had legislation. Part of the legislation required the Government of B.C. to spend $3 million a year, but because it was provincial, it was unilaterally removed. We need federal protection in terms of parks in that area.

The Chair: Okay. I am just going to let you know that I don't have the authority to run the meeting overtime, and we have gone overtime. I do want you to put—

Mr. Dave Porter: Then invite us back.

The Chair: Fair enough. Please put that in writing and send it to us, because we do want to consider what you have to share with us. I am really sorry to have to cut you off. It is just that we are out of time.

I thank you all for being here. As we proceed with this, the committee will decide whether we want to extend the time to be able to have you back. We really value what you have said today.

For the committee, is there anything that anybody wants to table at this point? I know we are overtime, and I don't think we have the ability to do anything more today.

Thank you so much. We will see you all on Tuesday next week.